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An Imaginary Community—Hotel

Miss JAN ALLAN

Assistant Teacher of English, Newtyle Secondary School, Angus

Newtyle is a comprehensive two-year school of approximately 120 pupils, its catchment area being rural. In session 1967-68 we organised on "common course" lines, with a 1st Year intake of 58, divided into two genuine mixed ability groups. The IQs of the first group ranged between 78 and 129, and the second 70 minus and 120.

It was decided to organise various anthological projects between mid-October and the beginning of the Christmas holidays. Initially, rather than embark on two "unknown" and a way perhaps somewhat formidable approaches, it was decided that one class should try the fairly conventional project of producing a magazine while the other class should be more venturesome and attempt to become and "live" as an imaginary community. Although, in the event, there was interesting cross-fertilising between the two, it is with the working of the imaginary community that this article is concerned. The planned duration was of six weeks, four periods each week, 24 periods in all. This left three periods a week for other work in English.

For our imaginary community we chose "Hotel," since this choice did not seem to require, for the English work involved, any great expert knowledge and I thought it would adequately cater for the interests of the pupils, both boys and girls. The "Hotel" operated mainly as a classroom project, but we were fortunate in having a local hotelier to speak to the children who, having taken the whole idea seriously, posed many questions, thus laying a foundation of knowledge.

As must be done with any project, we made a list of the end-products to come from the project or be developed through it:

Written

- Advertisements (graded)
- Letters of application
- Letters accepting posts
- Brochure
- Diary of a guest

Report for holiday guide

Letters of complaint

Description of emergencies affecting different departments.

Oral

Discussion on location and name of hotel

Interviews

Discussion on perfect guest

Discussion on unpopular guest

Emergencies in various departments

Coach parties

Breathalyser—moral problems involved

Dramatised situations.

Obviously to start with the work was entirely oral, involving class discussion on a suitable location for the hotel, its name, size and other related matters. It was in this activity that I became aware of just how fully committed the children were to the idea: motivation had certainly been provided for all subsequent work. They branched into such questions as accessibility for staff and guests, facilities to be offered, size in relation to maintenance costs, etc. Even the name was anything but a random selection—KINBANON—embracing the three school "houses," Kinpurnie, Bannatyne and Hatton.

Thereafter, of course, oral and written work were interspersed and complemented each other.

For oral work every child was interviewed by *their* previously selected manager and manageress. This proved to be a time-consuming process—to be curtailed in future, but not omitted, for each child must feel part of this imaginary community if it is to be a success. Competition in the interviews was keen and disappointment acute when someone failed to get a job. Imaginary emergencies in the various departments of the hotel afforded opportunities for impromptu dramatised situations, and we had the expected play about a burglary on the premises. In discussion, some of which was taped and played back, children demonstrated their ability to appreciate the position of hotel staff and their attitude to guests by expressing their views on good and bad guests.

As far as the written end-products were concerned, advertisements in newspapers were studied and compared before the children composed their own for KINBANON HOTEL, or for the individual posts for which they wrote applications. The class studied the AA system of hotel classification and composed the entry for their own hotel. After a class lesson had been taught on the formal layout and exposition of the letter, all wrote letters applying for posts and subsequently letters accepting the posts. Not everyone was expected to tackle the more advanced writing forms involved in the brochure or the guest's diary. Experience showed that while the children more able in English will want, or can be easily led, to tackle the more challenging kinds of writing, sometimes the less able were keen to try—and they should never be discouraged.

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